

## SUMMARY

**Title:** *Does Yahweh Exist? A Philosophical-Critical Reconstruction of the Case against Realism in Old Testament Theology*

**Author:** J.W. Gericke

**Supervisor:** D.J. Human

**Co-supervisor:** J.H. Le Roux

**Department:** Old Testament Science

**Degree:** Philosophiae Doctor

**Does Yahweh exist?** What is the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the Old Testament texts? Is the deity merely a character of fiction or does He also exist in extra-textual reality?

According to the viewpoint of the devil's advocate whose perspective on the issue is articulated in this thesis, the answer to the question is simply, no – Yahweh does not exist. He may seem real to those who believe in him and in the world of the text but he has no extra-textual and extra-psychical counterpart.

To prove such a controversial claim, the **philosophy of religion** has been utilised as auxiliary discipline within Old Testament studies in the form of **philosophical-critical analysis** (philosophical criticism / philosophy of Old Testament religion). A devil's advocate's **case against realism in Old Testament theology** has been reconstructed in the form of **seven arguments against the existence of Yahweh**.

According to the **argument from theological pluralism**, one element of the depiction of Yahweh in the text that is rather suspicious is the fact that Yahweh is characterised in ways that blatantly contradict each other. Both synchronic and diachronic perspectives on the theological contradictions suggest that there is no coherent biblical view of what Yahweh is actually like, what his will is and what he supposedly did. This deconstructs realism since the same actually existing entity cannot have discrepant attributes, hold mutually exclusive moral beliefs and have a history of both doing something and not doing the same thing at the same time.

From the perspective of **the argument from unorthodox theology**, it is apparent that Yahweh is often depicted in ways most unorthodox from the point of view of Christian philosophical theology. Some texts appear to suggest he may not be eternal, single, omnipotent, omniscient, precognisant, immutable, omnipresent or wholly uninvolved in the actualisation of evil. If there is a God and if this God has all the attributes assigned to him by popular classical Christian philosophical theology, it follows that unorthodox depictions of Yahweh must be fictitious.

In the view of **the argument from polymorphic projection**, everything about the god Yahweh appears suspiciously all-too-human. What Yahweh believes about the world, his self-talk, what he considers morally right and wrong and the way in which his own abode is run are all uncannily similar to the worldview and superstitions of the Iron Age Levant. The divine variables never transcend this all-too-local and all-too-cultural matrix and even change along with it. This unmasks Yahweh as an anthropomorphic, sociomorphic and psychomorphic projection – a character of fiction who does not exist outside the minds of those who created him in their image.

**The argument from mythology and syncretism** demonstrates that the discourse of Yahweh's religion and the sacred stories and poems in which he features contain numerous parallels to the myths, legends, folklore and superstitions found in other pagan religions. There are also marked traces of syncretism between the cult and theology of Yahweh and the ideologies of the Israelites' neighbours which, in each case, predates Yahwism. This suggests that Yahweh's ontological status may very well not be all that different from that of El, Baal, Zeus or Maduk.

From the perspective of **the argument from fictitious cosmography**, the world in the text where Yahweh is depicted as existing, acting and in which his abode is located and of which he is the creator, does not exist. Yahweh's world and his worldview are demonstrably fictitious. Since the Old Testament depicts Yahweh as being “up there” in the sky and since we know that he is demonstrably not there, Yahweh-as-depicted stands unmasked as a character of fiction.

**The argument from fictitious history** asserts that the Old Testament is filled with historical fiction. For a variety of reasons, it can be demonstrated that many of the

depictions of supposed historical scenarios are completely fictitious in that they never happened in the way the details of the accounts imply were the case. Since what was intended as history is actually fiction and no god literally appeared, acted and spoke as Yahweh is depicted as doing, it follows that Yahweh as thus depicted is a character of fiction. He does not exist.

Finally, **the argument from meta-textual history** shows that, on the one hand, the all-too-recent and all-too-local origins of the worship of Yahweh on a historical and cosmic scale unmask it as a wholly human enterprise. On the other hand, the Old Testament texts themselves have all-too-human origins rather than being the result of actual divine revelation. The Old Testament appears not to be the Word of God but human words about an allegedly existing deity. The development of Yahwism and its derivatives (Judaism and Christianity) seems not to have been determined by progressive revelation but by socio-cultural paradigm shifts and a history of repressed anti-realist tendencies. From such a meta-textual historical perspective it becomes obvious that Yahweh-as-depicted in the text is indeed no more than a product of human ideological imagination. In other words, he does not really exist.

Though not all seven of **these devil's advocate's arguments** may be equally devastating when viewed in isolation, in the form of **a cumulative argument** against realism, they constitute seemingly irrefutable proof that Yahweh-as-depicted in the text does not exist. Consequently, realism collapses not only in Old Testament theology but also in any form of theism somehow related to, rooted in and/or dependent on realism in its discourse.

**KEYWORDS**

God

Yahweh

Atheism

Arguments against the existence of Yahweh

Old Testament Theology

Philosophy of religion

Philosophical-critical analysis

Ontology

Realism

Devil's Advocate



## OPSOMMING

**Titel:** *Bestaan Jahwe Werklik? 'n Filosofies-Kritiese Rekonstruksie van die Saak teen Realisme in Ou Testamentiese Teologie*

**Outeur:** J.W. Gericke

**Promotor:** D.J. Human

**Mede-Promotor:** J.H. Le Roux

**Departement:** Ou Testamentiese Wetenskap

**Degree:** Philosophiae Doctor

**Bestaan Jahwe werklik?** Wat is die ontologiese status van die god Jahwe soos uitgebeeld in die teks van die Ou Testament? Is hy maar net 'n fiktiewe karakter of bestaan Hy ook in die wêreld buite die teks?

Volgens die siening van **die duiwels advokaat** wie se perspektief in hierdie tesis geartikuleer word is die antwoord op die eerste vraag bloot, nee – **Jahwe bestaan nie**. Hy mag dalk as werklik ervaar word deur diegene wie in hom geglo het en in die wêreld binne die teks maar Jahwe soos uitgebeeld in die teks het geen ekstra-tekstuele en ekstra-psigiese ewebeeld nie.

Om hierdie stelling te regverdig word die **godsdienfilosofie** ingespan as hulpdisipline binne die Ou Testamentiese wetenskap in die vorm van **filosofies-kritiese analiese** (filosofiese kritiek / godsdienfilosofie van Ou Testamentiese religie). 'n Duiwel's advokaat **saak teen realisme in Ou Testamentiese teologie** is gerekonstrueer in die vorm van **sewe argumente teen die bestaan van Jahwe**.

Volgens **die argument van teologiese pluralisme** is een element van die voorstelling van Jahwe wat nogal as suspisius voorkom die feit dat Jahwe gekarakteriseer word op wyses wat mekaar liederlik weerspreek. Beide sinkroniese en diakroniese perspektiewe op die teologiese teenstrydighede toon aan dat daar geen koherente bybelse siening bestaan van Jahwe se eienskappe, wil en dade nie. Hierdie stand van sake dekonstrueer realisme aangesien dieselfde veronderstelde werklike entiteit nie

teenstrydige eienskappe, weersprekende morele oortuigings of by dieselfde geleentheid dieselfde ding beide gedoen en nie gedoen het nie.

Vanuit die perspektief van **die argument van onortodokse teologie** wil dit voorkom dat Jahwe dikwels uitgebeeld word op wyses wat uiters onortodoks is vanuit n Christelike filosofiese teologiese oogpunt. In sommige tekste word daar skynbaar geimpliseer dat Jahwe nie ewig, enig, almagtig, alwetend, onveranderlik, alomteenwoordig en geheel en al onskuldig in die realisering van die bose is nie. As God bestaan en die eieskappe het wat klassieke Christelike filosofiese teologie aan Hom toedig beteken dit dat die onortodokse uitbeeldings van Jahwe in die teks as fiktief beskou moet word.

Volgens **die argument van polimorfiese projeksie** is feitlik alles omtrent die karakter Jahwe in die teks al te menslik. Wat Jahwe glo aangaande die wêreld, die wyse waarop hy redeneer, wat hy as moreel normatief beskou en die wyse waarop sy eie hemelse milieu gekonstitueer is reflekteer die bygelowe van die Ou Nabye Ooste in die Ystertydperk, transendeer dit nooit nie en verander daarmee saam. Hierdie elemente in die voorstelling van Jahwe ontmasker hom as n antropomorfiese, sosiomorfiese en psigomorfiese projeksie – n fiktiewe karakter wat nie bestaan buite die verbeelding van diegene wat hom na hulle eie beeld geskep het nie.

**Die argument van mitologie en sinkretisme** toon aan dat die diskoers van Jahwe se godsdienste en die gewyde stories en gedigte waarin hy figureer n groot hoeveelheid parallels met die mites, legendes, volksverhale en bygelowe van ander godsdienste bevat. Daar is ook vele tekens van sinkretisme tussen die kultus en teologie van Jahwe enersyds en die ouer ideologie van Israel se bure andersyds. Hierdie stand van sake impliseer dat Jahwe se ontologiese status waarskynlik nie veel verskil van die van El, Baal, Zeus of Marduk nie.

Vanuit die perspektief van **die argument van fiktiewe kosmografie** is die wêreld binne die teks waarbinne Jahwe bestaan, optree, waarbinne sy tuis gelokaliseer is en wat hyself geskep het n fiktiewe konstruksie. Jahwe se skepping en sy eie wêreldbeeld is verifieerbaar fiktief. Aangesien die Ou Testament Jahwe voorstel as synde tuis in die lug daarbo, terwyl ons vandag weet dat hy nie daar is nie, staan

Jahwe soos uitgebeeld in die teks ontmasker as 'n fiktiewe karakter met geen ewebeeld in die wêreld buite die teks nie.

**Die argument van fiktiewe geskiedenis** beweer dat die Ou Testament gevul is met historiese fiksie. Om verskeie redes is dit duidelik dat baie van die verhale in die teks wat as histories feitlik voorgedhou word heeltemal fiktief is in die sin dat die details van die gebeure deur die teks geskets nooit plaasgevind het nie. Skynbaar het geen god werklik verskyn, opgetree en gespreek soos wat die teks beweer Jahwe gedoen het nie. Dit impliseer dit dat die karakter Jahwe wat op dié wyse uitgebeeld word self 'n fiktiewe is en nie werklik bestaan nie.

Laastens wys **die argument van metatekstuele geskiedenis** enersyds daarop dat die oorsprong van die Jahwisme in die godsdiensgeskiedenis al te reser en plaaslike was en dus ontmasker staan as die produk van 'n bepaalde historiese en kulturele menslike ideologie. Andersyds blyk dit dat die Ou Testamentiese tekste self 'n al te menslike oorsprong en geskiedenis het en nie werklik die resultaat of rekord van egte goddelike openbaring was nie. Die Ou Testament kan dus nie as die Woord van God gesien word nie maar eerder as die woorde van mense aangaande 'n veronderstelde godheid. Die ontwikkeling van die Jahwisme en sy afgeleide gelowe (Judaïsme en Christendom) blyk self gekenmerk te word nie deur progressiewe openbaring soos gemeen word nie maar deur paradigma skuiwe en 'n repressie van anti-realisme in eie gelede. Vanuit so 'n metatekstuele perspektief blyk dit weereens duidelik te wees dat Jahwe soos hy voorgestel word in die teks weinig meer is as 'n produk is van menslike ideologiese verbeelding.

Alhoewel nie al sewe van die duiwels advokaat se argumente ewe bepalend is as dit in isolasie beskou word nie is **die saak teen realisme as kumulatiewe argument** skynbaar 'n onbetwisbare bewys dat Jahwe soos uitgebeeld in die teks nie werklik bestaan nie. As gevolg hiervan beteken dit nie net die einde van realisme in Ou Testamentiese teologie nie maar ook in enige ander vorm van teïsme wat op enige wyse hoegenaamd verwant, afhanklik en gewortel is in daardie betrokke diskoers.

**SLEUTELTERME**

God

Jahwe

Ateïsme

Argumente teen die bestaan van Jahwe

Teologie van die Ou Testament

Godsdienfilosofie

Filosofies-kritiese analiese

Ontologie

Realisme

Duiwels Advokaat





## POSTSCRIPT

**Yahweh came from Sinai  
He went up to them from Seir  
He appeared in shining light...**

**(Deut 33:2)**

.....

**Yahweh, when you went out from Seir  
When you walked in front...  
The earth trembled  
The heavens dripped...  
Mountains moved...**

**(Judg 5:4-5)**

.....

**One is calling to me from Seir  
Guard, how far is it into the night?  
Guard, how far has the night progressed?  
The guard says, "The morning has come, but it is still dark,  
If you want to ask, ask  
You can come back anytime..."**

**(Isa 21:11-22)**